

VZCZCXR06832
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHDK #0681/01 0751625
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 161625Z MAR 06 ZDK RUEHPC CTG SVC ONLY
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4602
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 0759
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0101
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0622

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 DAKAR 000681

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/W, INR/AA, AND DS/IP/ITA
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/15/16
TAGS: PINS PGOV PINR ASEC CASC SG
SUBJECT:A (MERCIFULLY BRIEF) HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

REF: DAKAR 1243

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CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER, FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Senegal is rightly known as an orderly place of dialog and consensus, but its elections have not always been without incident. Concern at possible unrest or repression in the coming presidential and legislative campaigns has been sparked by four events: a new book tracing political violence since Independence; unruly student protests in Dakar and Saint Louis and a forceful police reaction; mutual charges of political thuggery between President Wade and a prominent leftist ex-ally; and tensions or in one case serious roughhousing between rival factions of Wade's ruling Democratic Party of Senegal (PDS). END SUMMARY.

BRINGING THE PRESIDENT TO BOOK

¶2. (C) Marcel Mendy, author of two books on Wade's rise and first years in power (Reftel), has just published "La Violence Politique au Senegal: de 1960 a 2003." Mendy works for the Interior Ministry, and his book is written in carefully measured nuance.

¶3. (U) Mendy argues that violence has erupted usually at specific stages in Senegal's electoral process:

-- 1) During "leadership renewal" (renouvellement des instances de base), when parties sell membership cards that provide the right to select leaders from neighborhood to village, borough, department, regional and national levels. Battles between "tendencies" in the ruling party tend to be especially fierce;

-- 2) "Investiture" of candidates for parliament, which gives party factions a last chance to compete for top jobs;

-- 3) A one-month campaign offers the possibility of conflict, although in fact Mendy's survey provides few examples of violence at this stage; and,

-- 4) Election results have been followed either by an immediate wave of opposition protest violence, as in the presidential election of 1988; or by a months-long series of incidents which may or may not have been directly linked to the election outcome, as in 1993-94.

¶4. (C) We asked Mendy over lunch about his analysis and

prognosis for the coming election and found that in private he is scathing and pessimistic. He believes overt violence is inherent in Senegal's personality-based (or "clientelist") politics, that this campaign or its aftermath could be violent, but that violence will probably not come from the opposition. While Socialist and leftist leaders have warned loudly that they will "take to the streets" in case they conclude the election was unfair, he discounts their ability or willingness to do so. "Socialists," he says, after 40 years in power, "are all meek accountants or office managers."

¶5. (S) In contrast, Mendy explains, PDS leaders "have come in off the street. They have no other careers or prospects. Losing a government post means losing everything, and they will not tolerate it." Wade and the PDS, moreover, have always considered violence appropriate to their political arsenal, he contends, and have kept gangs of ruffians to do the rough work. (Wade's well-known "calots bleus" were largely integrated into police or gendarmerie after 2000, but some were recruited as bodyguards by local PDS bosses.) Wade would probably not order violence, Mendy says, and it remains to be seen if he would allow or discourage it, but the problem is that, once PDS violence starts, Wade "will not be able to stop it even if he wants to."

SOMETHING ROTTEN ON CAMPUS

¶6. (SBU) The March 2 cover of "Nouvel Horizon," Senegal's main newsmagazine is entitled "Why the University is Burning." It features a lone, helmeted gendarme with tear gas grenade launcher, standing tense and at the ready on a nearly deserted street strewn with rocks and bricks with fire and billowing smoke in the distance. In fact, student protest, with heavy rock throwing, proceeded in two waves. The first provoked

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hardly any police reaction save an attempt to protect nearby main roads. In the second, however, students were by most accounts more unuly than they have been in years. Some antagonized police (dropping boiling water on them, for example), and police reacted with an unusual degree of force, causing numerous injuries including some serious ones. Sympathy protests were held in Saint Louis, and police response there was muscular as well.

¶7. (U) The immediate cause of the protests was a complaint that the campus cafeteria's meat was spoiled and "covered with worms." Daka's campus, built for 6,000 students, now has 47,500. Campus housing, with beds for 5,200, now holds over 20,000: there is said to be "sub-letting of bed or floor space." In large classes throughout the Faculties of Letters, Law and Management, students must often stand for lectures. The Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy are also said to be deteriorating.

¶8. (C) In tandem with infrastructure deficiencies, there is deepening politicization. In the past, student politics was relatively simple: each party had its militants. Interior Minister NGom seems to believe the old model holds true. With the opposition in mind, he declared: "There is clearly serious reason to believe the student movement has been infiltrated and taken over. Clandestine forces have made student movements their instruments in order to achieve, for undisclosed ends, the destabilization of authority." Students and others on campus doubt that NGom understands what is happening.

¶9. (C) University Ombudsman, Bouba Diop, formerly head of the CONGAD umbrella group of NGO's, is charged with reconciling different and competing campus interests. Yet Diop tells us there is no single association with authority to negotiate on students' behalf. Politics is amorphous, disorganized, dispersed... about the only such

word he did not use was chaotic. Student rivalries are cross-cutting: faculty versus faculty, religious versus secular, political party versus party, and, extremely severe, between warring factions of the ruling PDS. Overall, campus life has degraded into "a culture of violence." A Diop colleague adds that ruffians are readily available on campus: protesters, like other Senegalese, sometimes employ unemployed wrestlers as bodyguards, he says, while other groups, mostly but not exclusively enrolled students, study martial arts to use during protests or competition for campus influence. For PDS MP and professors' union head Ngokhobaye Diouf, campus congestion "concentrates violence in the student's blood."

¶10. (S) What most Senegalese who know the university agree on is that the campus PDS is badly splintered, to some extent reflecting the split between Wade and ex-PM Idrissa Seck, and that the PDS has lost whatever campus control it had at the start of Wade's presidency. The founder and long-time leader of PDS university and youth movements, ex-Minister of Environment Mamadou Diagne Fada, lamented to us that PDS students now reflect national-level factional divides. The university, he predicted, must and will be aided financially to get through this school year, because "2007 will be turbulent on campus, and the government cannot allow two "annees blanches" (cancelled school years) in a row.

ONE-TIME ALLIES TRADE RECRIMINATIONS

¶11. (C) Wade charged that student protests were inspired by the Opposition in complicity with an unnamed country that everyone quickly figured out meant Laurent Gbagbo's Cote d'Ivoire. Almost no one believed the foreign-hand accusation, and it was clear Wade was fingering his long-time leftist ally Abdoulaye Bathily.

¶12. (C) Bathily responded quickly, but to avoid charges of libeling the Chief of State, he penned an open letter to "PDS Secretary General Wade." After denying he had organized current campus protests, Bathily said that in 1988, he opposed PDS booby-trapping of cars and tracts "calling for armed forces insurrection." In 1989, he accused Wade, "without consulting (coalition allies), you called for fighting forces of order with machetes, stones and bicycle chains." Recalling the 1994 killing of a constitutional judge and 2003 beating of a young critic, Bathily concluded, "observations I have made of your road to power, and notably your way of treating adversaries of

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the moment, lead me to believe that henchmen who have targeted me for the last two years are ... not acting in isolation or on their own initiative," but that they are "orchestrated by a master's hand."

¶13. (S) Over lunch, Bathily and Wade's long-time Labor Minister Yero De, emphasized that Wade was accustomed to using force, and that he would allow or even order supporters to "do anything necessary" to hold onto power if the PDS loses the coming presidential election.

EXORCISM IN THE PDS

¶14. (C) There are numerous fault lines within the PDS, including: a) Idrissa Seck's fans versus his enemies; b) old-line PDS loyalists versus Socialist turn-coats whom Wade has co-opted with senior government positions or parliamentary seats; c) local rivalries at the city or regional level that have little to do with national loyalties; and, increasingly, d) serious differences between PM Macky Sall and the machine he is trying to establish, versus a line-up of old-time Wade intimates.

¶15. (C) PDS "renewal," or selection of new leaders, is

not going smoothly, but few are surprised by the problems PM Macky Sall is having bringing local bosses to heel. He was, for example, blocked by a coalition of powerful local PDS barons from changing local structures in Saint Louis. At least Sall has not been chased from the podium, as happened to Dakar Regional Council President Abdoulaye Faye when he tried to manage renewal in Thies. A chair-throwing mano-a-mano between Wade's people and Seck's hometown fans led to dissolution of the Thies PDS, a move even Sall had to admit was "extreme." There has also been some untoward internal PDS scuffling at Dakar's Tony Meridien Hotel, and in Ziguinchor, invasion of a PDS session by a rival faction's toughs "sent everyone running in an every-man-for-himself."

¶16. (S) Ex-Minister Fada told us he was ousted from the cabinet because "neutrality was not enough" for those who demanded that he denounce his "good friend Idrissa" Seck. The press talks of anti-Seck "falcons" around Wade, Fada said, but there are really only two: PM Sall and Wade's son Karim. With sophisticated contempt, Fada described Sall's attempts to renew the PDS as contrary to law and PDS practice and without regard to those who fought for so long for Abdoulaye Wade. "Who says," he demanded rhetorically, "that Macky Sall has the right to head the party, while Aminata Tall, Assembly President Pape Diop and I are left outside?" (Tall "resigned" her Ministry March 14 after bitter exchanges with the PM.) Fada foresees disappointed PDS loyalists simply staying home during the elections, and said there is speculation that a new Liberal party could be formed outside the PDS.

COMMENT

¶17. (S) Fortunately for Senegal, predictions or threats of violence are more frequent than violence itself. Senegalese, though, are political hypochondriacs who love to fret about possible post-election violent scenarios that include: a) Wade wins the presidency but loses Parliament, leading to a period of government stasis and opposition attempts to weaken Wade by taking to the streets; b) Wade wins Parliament and Presidency in what is perceived to be a rigged election; opposition protests are reinforced by popular discontent; and Ousmane NGom's Interior Ministry uses force at its disposal to restore calm; or, c) in the worse case scenario, Wade loses the Presidency; PDS hard-line ministers use force to retain power; and Wade permits them free rein or tries but fails to restrain them. None of these pessimistic scenarios reflects or even allows for Wade's long-term commitment to democratic governance and free elections.

¶18. (S) What we can expect over the next year are more bitter disputes within the PDS and possibly some physicality during current organizational "renewals" or when parliamentary candidates are chosen toward the end of the year. In areas where Seck's fans are strong, like Thies, factional violence is possible but should not greatly affect community peace. Aminata Tall is a wild card in the process. Interior Minister Ousmane NGom and Justice Minister Cheikh Tidjane Sy also have roles to play. More probable is intensified protest or conflict at a Dakar university campus increasingly characterized

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by uncontrolled growth, inadequate budgets, an unable-to-cope management, proliferation of uncoordinated and competing student political groups, a religious component, and gestation of a "culture of violence" in a small confined space.

¶19. (S) If the government approaches the university as a social order problem to be resolved, it no doubt has the capacity and even the funding to start working toward a solution. There is concern though, that Wade and PM Sall will instead see virtually everything over the next

year through the prism of elections and the search for political advantage.

Jackson